

IMPLEMENTING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS WITH EFL LARGE
GROUPS: CHALLENGES AND USEFUL STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Speaking skills is the primary aim of communication; however, teaching speaking skills remains a challenge in certain language environments. FL teachers, as well as learners, face multiple difficulties in the process of learning a target language. On one hand, learners are often demotivated to learn the FL because of teachers' traditional methods, which rarely enhance students' interactions with each other. Additionally, classes are often large, so learners do not have enough opportunities to use and practice the language due to situations such as disruptions, noise and a lack of attention from their teachers. On the other hand, teachers struggle to provide student-centered instruction and their methods focus on teaching grammar and writing/reading skills, responding in this way to the national standard requirements. Instructors fail to implement speaking skills teaching effectively because of a lack of resources and training. Language researchers have carried out multiple studies in specific FL contexts and they have claimed that there is an urgent need for teachers to shift their practices from teacher-centered instruction to a student-centered learning environment where they are frequently exposed to the FL and have meaningful opportunities to use it.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family who has always supported me with their prayers and love from a distance, and to my husband for trusting on me. They have always encouraged me to be perseverant and do my best. I also want to show my appreciation to my friends and colleagues for their motivating words and for showing me support in different ways.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Title Page	i
Abstract	i
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	v
Chapters	
1. Chapter One: Introduction	1
2. Chapter Two: Literature Review	9
3. Chapter Three: Project Design	24
4. Chapter Four: The Project	27
5. Chapter Five: Conclusions.	46
Appendix	48
References	74

Chapter 1: Introduction

EFL teachers are often concerned about how to teach the language effectively when the students are immersed in a social environment that creates few opportunities to be exposed to and use the targeted language. Al Hosni (2014) stated that the lack of a target language environment results in a lack of involvement in real-life situations in reference to teaching speaking skills to EFL learners. Clearly, it is challenging to teach a language under certain kinds of conditions, but it is more challenging to develop productive skills when learners rarely interact with each other to practice what they have learned.

“Classroom interactions has been a central issue in teaching and learning in the era of communicative language teaching” (Sundari, 2017, p. 147). For the last 30 years, the new approaches to teaching languages have promoted developing communicative skills by creating real-life situations or meaningful contexts that encourage learners towards a social use of the language. However, it is evident that some learners are not motivated enough to speak the language in the classroom. Sundari (2017) affirmed that in these educational spaces, communication is mostly initiated and maintained by the teachers. They give their instruction in a combination of L1 and L2, ask questions, and model how to use the language to provide some exposure to English and make their learners talk and practice in short interactions.

Although EFL teachers try to create interactive opportunities to speak the language, in doing so, there are multiple speaking difficulties that learners and teachers often face. Al-Hosni (2014) claimed that speaking is considered a main language skill that students should improve,

but it has been widely noticed that they face many difficulties in speaking English. Those problems are related to motivation factors, teaching strategies, exposure to the language, and opportunities to use it. Ur (1996 as cited in Al-Hosni, 2014) also mentioned among other factors, a low and uneven participation, because of large classes, leads some learners to speak more, very little, or not at all.

Speaking activities in large classes comprise whole-class interactions, which result in a barrier for learners to speak. In FL classrooms, learners seem not to gain enough competence in speaking. Arifin (2017) asserted that teaching speaking in English as foreign language is perhaps the most emergent aspect of language skills. Learners struggle to develop their speaking competence while in the English classroom, and teachers work too hard to see little improvement with this skill, even though the teachers themselves are proficient speakers of the language; this demonstrates that “teacher’s advance in speaking competence is not a guarantee that he/she can develop their students’ speaking ability” (Arifin, 2017, p. 29). EF teachers should, not only have achieved good level of the target language, but also be knowledgeable about good teaching strategies that facilitate their work.

Teaching speaking skills are one of the main aims when teaching a language. Communicative competence is sometimes measured throughout the ability to speak and use the language in different contexts. There are some limiting factors that both teachers and learners face regarding performing well in the classroom. On one hand, the factors influencing learners’ speaking skills are psychological like nervousness, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Juhana (2012 as cited in Arifin, 2017) revealed in his research on psychological factors that fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence and lack of motivation affect students’ ability to speak in the English class. A notable fact is that this is a phenomenon happening, not only in

school environments, but also in universities. On the other hand, teachers also face problems related to self-esteem. If they feel competent and have a good attitude, this may result in a direct positive effect that may enhance students' motivation, self-esteem and anxiety levels.

Difficulties in developing speaking skills are significant related to class size, too. Large classes seemingly influence classroom interactions to the extent that teachers create few opportunities to interact with students one-on-one but enhance whole-class interactions. Moreover, the number of students in a large class makes teachers to struggle carrying on oral activities. Sundari (2017) reported that teachers complained about their noisy classes and how these environments did affect learners' performance because the groups used to be heterogenous. In consequence, high performing students and low performing students, as well as the disruptive ones, may interact differently. Large classes are a common characteristic in many public schools. Despite the definition of a large class, the concept may differ from one institution to another. Yet they are a common reality in educational environments and challenge EFL teachers.

Teaching speaking skills in large-sized classes seems to create some barriers to helping learners achieve the language standards. EFL teachers are willing to help learners develop writing, reading, listening and speaking skills, but they usually struggle to teach speaking in contexts with many students. Being proficient in English is not a guarantee a teacher will be successful at teaching the target language. Most difficulties are discerning what strategies and what kind of activities to apply effectively.

Therefore, I created a booklet that describes some of the difficulties EFL teachers face when working on speaking skills in large heterogenous classes. The product integrates some strategies to work with large groups and some useful tools that may work well in this kind of context. As an EFL instructor, I have experienced teaching in different learning contexts. Some

schools were private, and learners had a good level of proficiency as well as enough resources to learn, but I also taught in public schools with numerous problems like overcrowded classrooms, lack of teaching resources and few hours of instructional time. Both language environments were quite different, and learners' performance varied depending on their personal goals to learn the language.

Additionally, motivation seems to be a strong factor related to students' ability to learn and speak the language. The booklet benefits teaching in EFL environments when working with large size classes. These kinds of environments are more common in public schools, so the booklet has been designed focused on these school contexts. Teaching speaking skills requires that educators identify some factors affecting interactions in the classroom. I describe the most common difficulties teachers face when teaching this skill, but I also include some frequent challenges learners have when participating in classroom interactions.

I believe that teachers' success is influenced by learners' motivation and outcomes. By knowing learners and their difficulties, teachers may plan how to incorporate useful strategies that help learners overcome some of the situations they usually face in the classrooms. The booklet recommends ten useful strategies and provides examples on how to implement them in the EFL classroom to engage students with the speaking activities and encourage them to talk. Many public-school teachers experience a shortage of time to teach speaking skills because of the length of the class period. Indeed, the booklet provides easy activities that do not require long periods of time.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Teaching English as a foreign language creates multiple challenges, especially when it is taught in contexts with limited opportunities to use the language. Songbatumis (2017) noted in her study that teaching EFL in a context where the language serves a limited purpose becomes a challenge. There are multiple studies presenting some of those problems in varied educational levels. For instance, Al Hosni (2014) discussed the speaking difficulties encountered by Grade five students in basic education schools in Oman. Likewise, Al-Shammakhi¹ and Al-Humaidi (2015) investigated the challenges faced by EFL teachers in Grade five mixed-ability classes. Afshar and Asakereh (2016) focused their research on Iranian EFL freshmen and seniors to find some speaking skills problems from learners' and instructors' perspectives. Similarly, Akbari (2015) described the challenges in teaching/learning English for EFL learners based on Iranian high schools. Some years later, Kara et al. (2017) researched Turkish EFL learners to describe the difficulties that they faced while speaking in their L2, and Pathan et al. (2016) addressed the major problems faced by the Libyan EFL schoolteachers. Many other studies have been conducted in some Arabian countries such as the one carried out by Fareh (2010) among others. Evidently, teaching English as a foreign language is likely to be a challenge worldwide, especially when oral skills are taught.

Teaching a language requires developing reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. As English has become a global demand, today it is more necessary to have a good quality of these skills in order to be able to communicate with others wide world. Fareh (2010) stated the

globalization of English has increased a universal demand of learning and teaching it as a foreign or second language. Teaching EFL is rapidly spreading in many countries all over the world. Thus, schools and language schools have designed teaching programs, as well as material and resources, to support teachers in the process of instructing students to learn the target language. However, some studies, like Fareh's (2010), have shown that some failures persisted when teaching EFL. The author revealed an "inadequate preparation of teachers, lack of motivation on the part of the learners, teacher-centered methods and inadequate assessment techniques are among the major problems that render EFL programs unable to deliver as expected" (p. 3600). Despite the multiple efforts that have been put into improving EFL teaching and learning, there are multiple challenges that both teachers and learners are currently facing.

Teaching the target language as a foreign language has not been very effective. "The outcomes of the teaching learning process are still below expectations despite the tremendous efforts exerted in teaching EFL" (Fareh, 2010, p. 3601). Some EFL teachers struggle to deliver an effective instruction of the language and it seems that some language learners may not be reaching the basic language proficiency level due to multiple factors such as inadequate teaching methods and teaching material, lack of exposure to the target language, few opportunities to use because of the crowded classes, and others. This situation is not only common in schools. Indeed, Al -Asmari (2015) reported that universities have developed their syllabi to enable students to communicate within and outside the classroom; however, learners' performance is not meeting language expectations. Language learners have the same perception about their language learning process. For instance, Yusuf and Zuraini (2016) reported students felt their preparation was not enough for speaking the language beyond the classroom. Teachers and learners are involved in multiple difficulties when it comes to speaking skills.

It seems that EFL language learners are not achieving the language goals after many years of academic instructions in different levels. For instance, Chowdhury and Shaila (2013) reported that undergraduate level students in Bangladesh could not communicate at all even after 12 years in school. Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018) also mentioned teachers' claims about students' poor performance after years of applying communicative methods. This is a strong characteristic in EFL learners that has encouraged many researchers to identify the reasons behind this issue. Communication is the final aim of speaking a language. All four skills serve this goal, but the speaking skill is the one which requires more attention in EFL contexts. According to Yusuf and Zuraini (2016), teachers and learners have been focusing their attention on developing their speaking skills properly. Teachers, as well as students, struggle to master this skill when they are not immersed in an environment that provides enough exposure to the language. The classroom becomes the only space to hear and use the language; however, classroom environments are neither equipped with effective teaching practices nor classroom aids to teach the language.

Large Classes

Among the multiple reasons creating difficulties for an effective language instruction, learning how to work with large classes seems to be significant. The number of students in a class has been discussed. Ur (1996 as cited in Renaud et al., 2007) concluded that "the average perception of a large class is around 50 students" (p. 13), but the exact number is not important because what matters is how teachers see the class size in each specific situation. Baker and Westrup (2000 as cited in Renaud et al., 2007) referred the same claim by stating that "a large class could be any number of students if the teacher feels the number of students does not allow them to make progress" (p. 13). Teaching EFL in large classes is a worldwide problem. Many

countries in the world are facing the same challenge. Cheng (2004 as cited in Fareh, 2010) reported large classes as a feature of the Chinese schools as well as the lack of teachers' preparation to face this issue. Yet Chowdhury and Shaila (2013) claimed that "in the developing countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan etc. large class is a common phenomenon" (p. 72). It means that English language teachers usually develop their instructions in large-sized classrooms, and those environments are probably to be contexts facing multiple difficulties. The size of the class plays a pivotal role when teaching speaking skills. Fareh (2010) indicated that the size made it difficult for teachers to develop activities for involving students in discussions or oral interactions. Even at university levels, overcrowded classrooms seem to be one of the main obstacles for developing communicative skills. In Al-Asmari's (2015) research in CLT in EFL university contexts concluded that large classes and other constraints are the major difficulties in implementing this approach.

The concept of a large class has been the topic of some studies related to language teaching. Having many students in an EFL classroom could raise multiple difficulties when teaching speaking skills. Marcus (1997 as cited in Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013) claimed that the concept is a debatable issue. Certainly, EFL teachers usually complain that their classes lack speaking activities because groups are too big for all to participate; in consequence, classrooms become noisy environments where students usually misbehave and refuse to talk in the foreign language. Chowdhury and Shaila (2013) also noted that "language teachers, all over the globe, may agree with the idea that there is an influential relationship between language instruction and class size" (p. 72). Working with large-sized classes may contribute to some of the limitations that teachers face when trying to develop speaking skills. Iranian high school English teachers in

Jafari's et al. (2015) research claimed that all their classes were large sizes; as a result, they found it difficult to organize groups and carry out oral communicative activities.

Moreover, Pathan et al. (2016) presented some reasons that negatively influence teachers' performance and classroom goals because of large classes. According to Pathan et al (2016), large-size classes limit teachers eye contact and reduce the opportunities to promote pair and group work as well as a good management or control of the class. The researchers also stated that large classes created challenges to communicate a message with clarity. For instance, Pathan et al. (2016) indicated that "teacher's voice may not reach to the last student and similar other oral tasks would be difficult" (p. 31). Clearly, it is evident that class size may determine the success of speaking activities in a classroom.

Small classes seem to be an appropriate environment for an effective learning and teaching environment. Renaud et al. (2007) pointed out that some TESOL teachers considered a small class to be 25 students. Undoubtedly small classes provide a better environment for helping students to learn the target language. Pathan et al. (2016) supported this assertion by claiming that "The smaller the number of class, better the opportunities and chances of individual attention and better the learning and effective the teaching to achieve the expected aims of teaching English as a foreign language" (p. 31). However, small-sized classrooms are not common, especially among public school contexts. Al-Asmari (2015) mentioned that in some EFL environments, classes are over-crowded, which may be a reason for learners' passiveness in classroom. Moreover, crowded educational centers challenge teachers and limit their ability to teach effectively. Teachers are forced to choose whole-class interactions that make the class noisy. One teacher in Sundri's (2017) research about classroom interaction in teaching EFL at lower secondary schools in Indonesia confirmed that their classes became noisy and out of control during speaking activities even though he assigned learners something to do. Teaching speaking skills in a large-size class seems to be demanding, so

EFL instructors should learn teaching techniques to successfully face some of the daily classroom situations in EFL contexts.

Renaud et al. (2007) pointed out the major challenges of teaching large classes and grouped them in four categories: managing the classroom, using pair and group work, teaching with limited resources, and motivating students. These researchers pointed out that teaching large classes has some advantages, such as having enough students for interactions and using more proficient learners to help lower-level ones. Renaud et al. (2007) also described some strategies to be implemented with large groups, which will be discussed later in this work.

Teaching Speaking Skills

Developing communicative skills also requires teachers to use effective methodologies different to the traditional teaching methods. The aim of teaching a language is to communicate. Currently, there is a need to speak English for getting access to multiple areas, jobs, or environments that require the use of the language. Yusuf and Zuraini (2016) affirmed that “speaking is perceived as the most fundamental skill to acquire since the onset of the communicative era is treated as the ultimate goal of language teaching, and its proper development has become the attention of both teachers and learners” (p. 542). Similarly, Afshar and Asakereh (2016) have highlighted oral skills as a requirement in teaching EFL/ESL. They claimed that “speaking is one of the four macro language skills which are required to be developed in order to EFL/ESL students to communicate effectively in different contexts” (Afshar & Asakereh, 2016, p. 112). Developing speaking skills is a goal that EFL teachers should work hard to meet in their language classes.

Speaking is a fundamental skill, but teaching speaking skills has become another challenge that EFL teachers usually face in their learning and teaching process. Songbatumis (2017) claimed that some teachers’ challenges are related to their lack of knowledge about teaching languages.

She affirmed that “English teaching challenges from teachers’ perspectives include[e] shortage of training, limited mastery of teaching methods, unfamiliarity to IT, and lack of professional development” (Songbatumis, 2017, p. 61). Other studies have discussed how students’ speaking skills might be affected by multiple factors connected to teachers’ teaching strategies or students’ attitudes. For instance, Aleksandrak (2011 as cited in Afshar & Asakereh, 2016) argued that the source of speaking skills problems in the EFL context is the lack of varied speaking activities and opportunities in the classrooms compared to the variety of situations in which learners could use the language in real-life situations. It is evident that learners need to be involved in real-life situations that allow them to use the language meaningfully.

Similarly, Afshar and Asakereh (2016) conducted research in an Iranian context to highlight some difficulties from teachers’ and learners’ perspectives. Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2014 as cited in Afshar & Asakereh, 2016) worked with Jordanian EFL students, and they identified other learners’ problems related to the development of those skills. They mentioned an excessive use of L1, overcrowded classes, and lack of sufficient time to practice speaking. Afshar and Asakereh (2016) also noticed that both instructors and learners in their study agreed in reporting the inefficient educational system of the country as one of the causes of the deficiency to teach the skill. However, the student population also declared that speaking classes are inefficient, so this claim may be another factor affecting teaching speaking skills.

Some of the difficulties to teach speaking skills may be related to the lack of innovative techniques and approaches that instructors should use for helping students develop their abilities. Learners in Afshar and Asakereh’s (2016) study claimed that teachers introduced uninteresting topics, which may not be communicative for them. However, they stated that instructors neglected to teach oral communication strategies. Some studies have noted that teachers kept

teaching English by using traditional methods and interactions are not enhanced in the classrooms in order to contribute to EFL's learner's fluency and conversational skills. Furthermore, Afshar and Asakereh (2016) revealed that some problems faced by Iranian EFL students were, among others, the inappropriate methods employed for teaching speaking skills and an inadequate focus on them. Equally, Jafari et al. (2015) concluded in their study in Iranian high school contexts, that although the department of education encouraged English teachers to use communicative approaches in their teaching practice, they still preferred using the traditional methods. EFL teachers seem to fail in using communicative teaching strategies that encourage learners to use the language.

Language teaching methods have always been a concern for ESL and EFL teachers. Thus, Mukattash (1983, as cited in Pathan, 2016) ensured that the role of appropriate methodology in EFL teaching has been the focus of some studies, and the use of inappropriate teaching methodologies is likely to be one of teachers' failures to help their learners to communicate. Turkish EFL classes presented similar obstacles related to speaking skills. A study developed by Kara et al. (2017) showed that students' failures in speaking the targeted language responded to inappropriate grammar-teaching methods that were implemented in language classes. Learners in that study expressed their desire to learn to speak the language rather than to learn grammatical rules. Chowdhury and Shaila (2013) presented some speaking difficulties encountered when teaching in a large classroom. One of their reasons was the connection between the traditional teaching methodology and the demotivation of students to actively participate in the class. Most of these failures in EFL teaching could be addressed if instructors received adequate training to be prepared to face the multiple situations that challenge them when teaching speaking skills.

Teacher's Training

Effective teaching of speaking skills is also related to teachers' training to teach a foreign language. Undoubtedly, teaching a language demands implementing a variety of techniques that promote students' participation individually and in groups. First, teachers need to provide enough exposure to the target language, which happens mainly during class time. However, because of large classes, instructors' preferences are in favor of the traditional methods and the frequent use of L1. Fareh (2010) reported in her findings that a considerable amount of EFL teachers at Arabic schools use the Grammar Translation Method and their classes are mostly taught in Arabic. Consequently, learners' outcomes may be poor and far from accomplishing the language standards. Some teachers do not feel encouraged to improve their teaching techniques because the national curriculum goals do not prioritize neither oral nor aural skills. Some teachers in Al-Sobhi and Preece's (2018) research indicated that they taught the four skills, but speaking and listening were never assessed because the national education laws did not require it. Thus, teachers fail to teach more speaking skills because they are not the emphasis in assessments.

In addition, some failures in effective EFL teaching are due to the lack of training for EFL teachers. For instance, Pathan et al. (2016) recalled the importance of good pedagogical training in order to be an effective English language teacher. The researchers reported a lack of professional training as a common challenge faced by teachers in most of the Arab countries. Alkhawaldeh (2010, as cited in Pathan et al., 2016) also reported that Jordanian English language schoolteachers needed some professional training such as how to use modern technologies inside

the classrooms. In fact, teacher training is currently becoming more necessary in the EF classrooms.

In addition to the training, the lack of appropriate teaching resources strongly shows the challenges faced by EFL schoolteachers. Public institutions usually lack basic teaching aids necessary in language classes. Al-Seghayer's (2014, as cited in Pathan et al., (2016) reported in a study that English teachers desired to see teaching aids on the walls. Shehdeh (2010, as cited in Pathan, 2016) also claimed that schools in most of the Arab countries lacked relevant teaching resources and facilities such as wall charts, flash cards, posters, audio and visual aids, language teaching and learning software, e-learning resources and labs with good equipment. Similarly, Kizildag (2009) reported failures in supporting EL teachers with infrastructure and supplies of good quality for their classes. Along with the complaints previously cited in this paper, Pathan (2016) and Al-Sobhi et al. (2018) also noted that schools need to be equipped with the modern teaching aids that responded to the requirements of a language class. Oppositely, schools and teachers lack adequate educational materials necessary to develop speaking skills and consequently communicative language. Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018) observed in their research that classrooms were equipped with computers, but teachers lacked listening materials to develop those language skills. The lack of learning resources to implement listening activities and enhance communicative language skills seem to be a common scenario in EFL settings.

Communicative Language Teaching

There is a need to change traditional language teaching approaches in teaching English, especially when teaching EFL learners. According to some researchers in this paper, instructors have adopted grammar translation methods along with teacher-centered methodologies to tackle

some of the difficulties they face in their EFL classes. Those traditional methods do not respond to a communicative approach that encourage learners to use English inside and outside the classroom. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is likely to be the most effective approach to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning. Indeed, Jafari and et al. (2015) pointed out that teachers in Iranian schools were encouraged to use CLT in their classes, despite the desirable outcomes seemed not to be efficient enough.

Iwai (2009) also highlighted this approach by concluding that “Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an effective approach to develop communication skills in meaningful contexts” (p. 94). Similarly, Al-Sobhi et al. (2018) found the approach to be an effective resource to enhance learners’ abilities to communicate in the target language. CLT seems to be a useful approach to activate learners’ participation and development of their speaking skills because its principles give relevance to learners rather than teachers. By using this approach, classes may become a learner-centered environment where students learn actively by using the language in their interactions. Thus, teachers become a facilitator and learners a participant (Al-Asmari, 2015). In the same way, Al-Sobhi et al. (2018) stated “the teacher’s role is to encourage the students to practice English and provide them with constructive feedback” (p. 9). They also claimed that choosing the most effective methodologies and approaches could help teachers not only to improve their teaching practice, but also to facilitate learners’ performance and oral skills.

CLT enhances speaking skills by making learners use the language in meaningful situations. It is through this approach that learners show an active use of the language and develop their speaking skills. Al-Hosni (2014) claimed that “speaking is the active use of

language to express meaning, and for young learners, the spoken language is the medium through which a new language is encountered, understood, practiced, and learnt” (p. 22). By implementing CLT, teachers could open a range of speaking opportunities for multi-level language students. Indeed, Gudu (2015) asserted that multiple English language scholars have claimed that some problems related to low oral skills could be solved by implementing class learner-centered activities that include songs, dramas, discussions, debate, tongue twisters and others. Those speaking activities could benefit learners in different ways and the choice of them would be based on students’ language proficiency level.

CTL promotes learners’ communicative competence. This approach changes the traditional strategy of teaching language skills in isolation instead of an integration of them. Nikitina and Furuoka (2006) claimed that communicative competence required four components. The researchers also stressed that formal accuracy and grammatical content played an important role in attaining communicative competence. The teachers’ role is to create authentic material and create meaningful tasks to use the language in real-life situations. In doing so, they need to give relevance to the linguistic competence. Iwai (2009) described in her study in Japanese settings, the relevance of the grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence to develop speaking skills. An adequate integration of those competences may facilitate communication skills and help learners identify appropriate use of the language, its intent, and message.

Learners’ Psychological Factors Affecting Teaching Speaking Skills

The use of CLT in the classroom brings another challenge for teachers. It seems that learners are reluctant to speak the language when teachers promote speaking activities in the

classroom. There are multiple studies that have discussed learners' inhibitions and most of them have included psychological factors as strong elements that impact learners' performances (Arifin, 2017; Al-Shammakhi1 & Al-Humaidi, 2015; Songbatumis, 2017; Akbari, 2015; Yusuf & Zuraini, 2016; Kara et al., 2017; Hakim, 2015). Arifin (2017) concluded that some psychological factors affecting students' participation in speaking classes are caused by the feeling of making mistakes and the lack of self-esteem, which are connected to shyness and anxiety. Al-Asmari (2015) supported this idea by claiming that lack of motivation, among other reasons, stand as a student-related challenge to implement CLT. Besides the fear to making mistakes and the lack of confidence, there are other psychological factors caused by the pressure of the classroom environment.

Low confidence blocks learners' willingness to communicate. This psychological factor is experienced because students may not feel competent enough to use the language. EFL groups are usually large and multi-level classes where learners with a high level of the language dominate the activities. Zhang (2009 as cited in Al-Hosni, 2014) claimed that one factor generating speaking difficulties in EFL learners is low or uneven participation. Low-level proficiency students can feel insecure and, in consequence, prefer to inhibit their participation.

Anxiety is a strong reason for learners' silence, and it may affect the development of their speaking skills. Anxiety is linked to shyness and fear, and classroom researchers argue that students experience it because they are afraid that other classmates might laugh or criticize their proficiency and performance in the target language (Arifin, 2017). Chowdhury and Shaila (2013) also supported this claim by suggesting adverse social environments as a common problem in the large speaking classes:

When a student is speaking before the audience the classmates do not remain encouraging or friendly. They laugh at him/her, joke about his/her mistakes, talk among themselves, sometimes they do not even pay attention to what he/she is saying. This unfavorable environment created by the peers impacts the speaker deeply. (p. 78)

Anxiety and other related-psychological factors seem to impact learners speaking performance in EFL classrooms.

Conclusion

Teaching speaking skills is a global demand that is increasing worldwide. However, EFL settings face multiple challenges when helping learners develop their communicative competence. Some difficulties are teacher related, others come from learners, and a few of them result when teachers try to implement traditional teaching approaches. Large classes are undoubtedly the source of some teaching difficulties. Teachers struggle to create classroom interactions in EF classrooms contexts because the number of students limits students' participation, generates disruptions and constrains teachers to provide frequent feedback.

Similarly, teachers' lack of training in order to implement new teaching speaking skills is another difficulty. Besides the few opportunities instructors have for learning new teaching techniques, multiple studies have reported that teachers complain about the lack of useful materials such as CDs, recorders, videos, textbooks and other materials to teach language skills. CLT seems to be an effective approach that would help teachers overcome some of these classroom challenges. Teachers need to implement new strategies focused on learners so they can learn by using the language in meaningful interactions. This approach provides useful techniques that benefit all kinds of learners with multiple language proficiency levels. Getting to

use CLT would reduce some classroom difficulties, which are product of learners' demotivation towards learning the FL. However, teachers may need to build a classroom environment that lowers learners' psychological factors including anxiety, low-confidence and shyness in order to have better conditions that facilitate classroom interactions and, subsequently, develop speaking skills.

Chapter 3: Project Design

This work intends to suggest a teacher resource for EFL teachers that presents some useful strategies for teaching English in large-sized classes. I have been discussing some challenges EFL teachers face when teaching speaking skills in large classes. Thus, a few number of teaching aids and a lack of knowledge about how to implement non-traditional approaches such as CLT have been featured in some studies (Fareh, 2010; Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018; Afshar & Asakereh, 2016; Jafari et al., 2015). EFL teachers struggle to incorporate innovative methodologies in their classes either because they do not have enough or appropriate teaching material or because they prefer developing their own instruction in a well-managed classroom. Some participant teachers in Jafari's (2015) research reported having difficulties organizing groups and oral communicative activities because of the large class sizes. Furthermore, Al-Asmari's (2015) research added that the lack of CLT training and resources and the low-proficiency of students are also challenging.

For this project I will design a booklet that describes the main challenges presented inside EFL classrooms. Large classes in these targeted contexts are a common characteristic not only in secondary education, but also in the university context; however, I will focus my attention only on EFL public school teachers because I have experienced teaching at the high school level where I struggled to teach speaking skills in 35-student classrooms. Additionally, high school teachers need to be enlightened about teaching strategies that may help them to reduce the speaking difficulties students are having in their classrooms.

Learners' difficulties developing communicative skills are strongly related to their lack of motivation and low English proficiency level (Jafari, 2015). It is also evident that there is a strong attachment to the traditional methods, and thus teachers may neglect to promote communication skills in their classes. Taguchi and Neganuma (2006 as cited in Iwai, 2009) reported some student complaints that were focused on instructors putting more emphasis on accuracy and precise translation of sentences rather than on conversational classes. Thus, the booklet created for this project will briefly describe some of the common practices that EFL teachers currently take to their classroom as part of their efforts to teach the foreign language.

First, the booklet will include common teaching practices in EFL classrooms, including what the targeted teachers might be doing to develop learners' communicative competence. Thus, I will collect data from a small number of EF instructors teaching different grade levels. Those participants will take a 20-question survey with closed and open-ended questions which will help me to identify some of the challenges in teaching in a Spanish-speaking language environment. Getting some teachers' perception from this context would be useful to see how similar their difficulties are to the ones mentioned in this paper.

Second, this teaching resource will compile a set of ten useful strategies and tools for creating communicative opportunities when working with large groups. This product will suggest some ideas to help teachers engage learners in communication. Students need to be involved in meaningful situations in the classroom that resemble the real-life situations happening outside the classroom. Thus, those classroom activities will respond to CLT principles by developing learner-centered tasks rather than promoting students' traditional passive role in which they develop linguistic competences based on learning only grammar.

This product aims to provide activities during which the student population can hear and use the foreign language. EFL classrooms seem to be the only place where learners practice their communicative skills (Savasci, 2014). Even though the classroom is a valuable space for developing speaking skills by providing enough exposure and practice to the target language, some teachers and learner-related difficulties may persist. The booklet will also suggest some ideas to handle learners' reluctant attitudes to participating in EFL oral activities. By addressing learners' fear and lack of motivation to use the target language in front of others, more chances to develop communicative activities can be created.

Chapter 4: The Project

Large-sized classes seem to be a common feature presented in public schools when teaching English as a foreign language. I have previously referenced some studies mentioning teachers facing these kinds of contexts not only at the secondary education level, but also at universities when teaching junior and senior students. Developing speaking skills when teaching EFL in large classes has been the topic of this paper. The target environment is large-sized groups because teachers struggle to make students talk and interact in those specific contexts due to the multiple circumstances related to demotivation, anxiety, lack of resources, as well as others. The concern is if teaching large classes is the main reason for instructors failing to develop speaking skills. According to Sharndama (2013), a large class means having more students than the recommended class size or than the learning materials and physical structures can withstand. The author also said that “a large class has a number of students in that can stop the teacher from working as expected and at the same time hampers students’ learning” (p. 35). Thus, teaching a large class remains a scenario with multiple problems to achieve communicative goals. The question is if teaching a small sized class may be the most convenient environment for an effective teaching and achievement of the target goals.

The number of students in a classroom is not a sufficient condition for achieving the communicative goals. Developing speaking skills in EFL contexts requires a conjunction of factors such as psychological-affective conditions, class materials, teaching training and others that, together, may help teachers and learners to move smoothly in the teaching-learning process.

This chapter aims to describe in detail the content of a booklet (see Appendix A) that I created to suggest some useful strategies and tools that EFL teachers could consider when developing speaking skills. The booklet has been designed by keeping in mind this context and factors, and I suggest ten strategies that teachers could use during their daily practice, especially if they are working with learners in a large-sized class. The challenges and 10 strategies described below have been included in the Appendix section, so teachers have a useful resource to analyze and compare their teaching practice.

Motivating Learners

Encouraging learners is the first strategy described in the booklet. Motivating students to learn the language should be an important element to be present in EFL classes. Students' lack of motivation could respond to their poor preparation for speaking the language. In consequence, they fear being laughed or criticized by their classmates if they make a mistake when answering a question or participating during the class activities. Peer-mockery was noted in Al-Sobhi's et al. (2018) research. The researchers said that some students create an unhealthy environment for communication, thus the classroom becomes a main obstacle to encourage learners to interact with each other. Undoubtedly, learners' negative attitude towards English language is a strong barrier. EFL teachers should take time to plan activities to identify their learners' needs, interests, preferences, and expectations. By knowing the learners, teachers could identify the topics and activities that may have them engaged in the lessons. Moreover, some unacceptable misbehavior could be prevented by setting classroom rules and teaching students to show respect for others.

Students' motivation sometimes is related to the kind of activities that teachers take to their classes. Instructors should vary the material and differentiate the activities. The language proficiency levels, the age and needs of students are the variables to consider when planning a lesson. Multi-level classes are sometimes the main reason for learners' demotivation. Advanced students get bored if activities are not challenging for them and weaker learners get distracted soon and become a source of disruption during the class if they cannot make sense of what they are doing. Teachers should use higher-level students as assistants or monitors during group work. These students could be showing their skills by helping others, and some activities could be success-orientated so weaker learners do not feel frustrated in completing speaking tasks.

Having multiple options for a large heterogenous class may be effective in facing demotivation factors when teaching EFL. Learners' engagement could inhibit certain classroom behaviors and motivate all learners to communicate despite their limited English proficiency. Chowdhury and Shaila (2013) pointed out that "instructors and learners need to feel confident, positive, relaxed and to be cooperative with each other" (p. 74). Building confidence and reducing students' anxiety and stress could be an effective way to enhance them in communication tasks. Nikitina and Furuoka (2006) claimed that oral drills, mechanical grammar and translation exercises are necessary, but teachers should also include in their class activities full of real-life situations. Learners need to understand the class goals and find meaning in the classroom activities. Teachers should take tasks that learners enjoy and find useful, so they feel engaged and take the risk to participate.

Using Innovative Strategies

The second strategy included in the booklet is related to innovation. Having learners motivated is not the only guarantee of an effective teaching and learning process. Teaching speaking in large classes requires special or innovative strategies and teaching tools so learners remain motivated to participate. It is sometimes assumed that innovation is only related to technology; however, innovative strategies could mean just something different from the daily practice. Language teachers need to use more than technological resources to make their classes look attractive. First, developing varied activities is a great generator of motivation. Learners need to be the center of the instruction and providing them with more oral tasks in which they practice and use the language may be innovative for them. Teaching EFL by using traditional approaches does not enhance an innovative teaching strategy. Teachers should create scenarios to help learners to learn how to use the target language in social situations, so providing some opportunities to make them involved in the activities and practice their speaking skills could be beneficial.

Innovative activities should integrate the four skills. Working reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in isolation is not recommended. Adopting interactive communicative teaching activities may be useful for learners. Yet, there are plenty of activities that may allow advanced and weaker learners to practice the language. Keeping in mind a large-sized class, activities such as songs, poems, rhythms, and tongue twisters may be convenient to stimulate students' interests. Additionally, these kinds of activities are helpful for teaching vocabulary and drilling pronunciation. Pre-teaching vocabulary as well as any grammar or functional language may facilitate teaching future speaking lessons. In doing so, learners may be more engaged in using vocabulary that they already know.

Although learners need to have more opportunities to interact with each other, creating interactions in a large class may require grouping students. Grouping in pairs or small groups may give learners opportunities to practice the language. Some innovative activities to privilege large-sized group participation could be *Semi-Structured Interviews* or *Conversations* in which learners follow a model, but, at the same time, they provide some real information.

Questionnaires such as “Find Someone” is a great source for making students interact. The activity could be extended to asking learners to report their findings by taking turns and participating.

There are other activities that promote whole group participation, such as *Linked Story Telling* initiated by the instructor by narrating anything in which learners could use learned vocabulary and grammar structures in continuing a story and taking it to a certain point. Even weaker learners could participate in this activity by using simple statements. As it was stated earlier, innovative speaking activities represent any speaking task different from the conventional activities that a teacher could take to their class to activate learners’ speaking skills. They do not need to use technology necessarily, neither do the tasks need to be complex in order to be innovative. It only requires from teachers some preparation and training to be able to use them effectively.

Participating Teachers Outgoing Training

A third element suggested in the booklet to support teachers developing speaking skills in large-sized classes includes an outgoing professional preparation or teaching training. Speaking is the primary productive skill and getting some mastery on how to develop it requires devoting time to training. Teachers should incorporate more time for learners to interact with each other.

Group discussions, role plays, language games, presentations and others must be developed in the classroom; however, carrying out this kind of activities may be easier if teachers are familiar with the appropriate strategies. Teaching languages is a changing field. Teachers should refresh their teaching experiences by knowing the current trends in the field. Al-Sobhi et al. (2018) claimed that “teacher training should be given high importance because it plays a fundamental role in enhancing the quality of the teachers’ performance in the classroom which consequently improves the students’ level of English” (p. 9). Teacher training may help educators to identify some useful strategies based on the contexts.

Teacher training should be linked to the use of appropriate teaching material. Some research previously mentioned in this paper reported that teachers usually lack enough teaching material for developing their classes. I developed a survey with 29 EFL teachers from different public schools in Colombia and the data showed that the main resource they count with is audios (CDS/cassettes/others) and textbooks. Fifty percent of the participants chose these former options as their primarily supportive material for teaching their classes. Providing English teachers with seminars, workshops and other training courses should be a good strategy for helping them learn methods of teaching. I would also suggest a collaborative teaching work throughout *Teachers Networks*. New technologies have highly benefited the access to plenty of online resources and information by just using any device. In fact, teachers could participate of professional training world widely and join academic groups in which they can interact professionally and have access to free helpful resources. It seems that sometimes the limitations are not the lack of material, but how to use them especially when the school does not count with enough technological resources that benefit language learners.

English Teachers Network could be a great solution for facing some difficulties related to lack of training and poor knowledge on teaching speaking skills in large groups. Based on the survey to Colombian EF teachers, 97% of them teach English in large-sized classes, thus getting to work in a English Network in which they could share experiences on some effective strategies, resources or teaching ideas would work well for improving their teaching practice by working collaboratively. This strategy would be beneficial for them because they work with large classes and limited time.

Teaching with Effective Materials

Another strategy that the booklet presents is related to materials. Teaching resources for developing speaking skills in large classes should be a topic of concern. Developing communicative skills demands identifying what type of educational material better enhances this aim. Useful resources for promoting speaking activities should include printed material, such as posters, flashcards, and any other kind of learning material to guide speaking tasks. It seems that some public schools count with teachers and students' textbooks. However, this educational material is not effective enough for teaching neither speaking nor listening skills because sometimes textbooks come with no audio CDs or because most activities have been designed to carry out only reading and writing tasks. Effective material to teach speaking skills also includes using authentic material that draws students' attention and allows them to performance positively. Teachers who are not well equipped with classroom materials are encouraged to make their own teaching material and save and reuse it during later lessons.

Flashcards as well as posters could be created by assigning students classroom projects. Learners will be engaged in making their own material for a later presentation. For instance,

promoting individual or group activities in which learners use visuals to support their oral presentations may be a great strategy to motivate students to learn and use the target language. Additionally, teachers could benefit of online resources and print and laminate them. In fact, there are multiple classroom lessons which may require the use of the same learning material to describe, present, or build stories. Besides printed material, another significant resource rests on the use of technology to implement some speaking activities with multiple levels of difficulty.

Implementing ICTs Appropriately

ICTs are also included in the booklet. Undoubtedly, ICTs have facilitated communication worldwide. The set of technological tools comprises recorders, radios, phones, video, television, computers, and other resources that help to create, disseminate, storage, and manage information (Sharndama, 2013). ICTs may be a useful tool when teaching a large class. Teachers could use technological resources to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language. ICTs should be a good option in large-sized classes. On one hand, they create more opportunities to use authentic material. Teachers could use video clips, songs, audio tapes, commercials, and even virtual cultural exchanges to create interacting activities including discussions, peer work, interviews, and others. ICTs allow the combination of pictures, sounds, and texts to have students engaged. They could have access to real videos and listening from native speakers which may draw their attention. English instructors could use multimedia resources, such as movies or short informercials to plan activities that require speaking. Using offline and online teaching as well as PowerPoint slides to display information to many students and present vocabulary and grammar content now makes a lesson more attractive and reinforce the traditional English teaching

methods. Learning and practicing English throughout websites have currently become a way to support most classes.

On the other hand, the use of ICTs may engage students in learning with autonomy and enthusiasm. Teachers could select a lesson material based on learners' level of language of proficiency and needs. There are multiple websites and applications and a huge number of printable materials to support speaking ideas in a large class. Teachers could be creative to combine written material with opportunities to use spoken language. For instance, information about some targeted people could be a great source for practicing the language by doing short presentations. However, learners could have access to outlines or write scripts to make short videoclips. Multimedia material may allow differentiate the instruction by assigning each learner activities based on their needs. Students with limited speaking skills could use some applications to record their voices or make videos if they do not feel comfortable when speaking in front of others. Multiple websites also provide opportunities to improve pronunciation and listening skills by exploring the activities based on students' language proficiency level.

Implementing ICTs in large-sized classrooms could be a great strategy to overcome some difficulties that teachers face when teaching in those environments. However, an appropriate use of the technologies needs to be done in order to get effective results. Sharndam (2013) remarked that ICTs themselves do not transform the learning and teaching of the target language. Teachers need to be trained in how to utilize them, so they may positively affect their teaching methods and strategies. It is an appropriate combination of knowledge of the language with the use of the technologies that may more greatly impact classroom practices. Using ICTs is a great strategy to change classes from teacher-centered to a student student-centered learning environment.

Promoting Communicative Language Teaching

In addition to the first five strategies described in the booklet, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was considered as a strategy for teaching speaking skills. This communicative approach promotes learner-centered activities and gives them more opportunities to practice oral skills. Adopting CLT in the foreign language classroom makes the students attentive and participative in the classroom. All activities aim to motivate students to communicate and have a positive attitude towards learning. By using the target language as a mean rather than as an objective, learners may be able to use the language while developing their skills. During communicative activities, learners participate in dialogues, discussions or debates. Those activities should be adapted by the instructor according to the students' proficiency. Thus, teachers could have more advanced learners contributing with longer and natural outcomes while weaker learners could participate with shorter statements and they may require more activation.

CLT requires developing classroom activities that integrate the four language skills. It has been previously exposed in this paper that individual communication skills should not be taught in isolation. Combining the four skills allows to foster communication. Learners may be more engaged in tasks in which they see, listening, analyze and express ideas based on different contexts. Some recommended activities could be setting tasks for creating conversations taking place at different scenarios. For instance, role plays may allow learners to speak and act in situations that resemble to the outside of the classroom contexts. Classroom discussions also encourage learners to share their ideas about a topic. Discussions could be a challenging activity, especially for the ones with a lower level of language proficiency; however, teachers could adjust discussions by using a step by step strategy in which learners search information, brainstorming vocabulary and useful expressions that they may use during the activity.

Additionally, teachers could group students in small groups and assign roles to each integrant, so students feel they are contributing in different ways to the discussion. Equally useful, interviews may develop students' communication skills. This last pedagogical task responds to the need of using engaging activities to solve difficulties related to the lack of speaking practice in large-sized groups.

Providing Greater Exposure to the Target Language

The booklet also emphasizes language exposure as a strategy to enhance speaking skills. During the language teaching and learning process, it is common to hear that teachers, as well as learners, should create opportunities to practice their skills both inside and outside the classroom. Yet EF teachers and learners fail to use spoken English very often. For instance, 63% of the Colombian FL teachers participating in the survey replied that they usually use the foreign language during their classes and only 16% of them reported they always do this. However, it is important to note that even using the language in class does not mean speaking it during the whole class period. There is a strong tendency to use the L1 during the foreign language class as practice, as many teachers still privilege some traditional teaching and learning methods.

Teaching speaking skills in a large-sized class is a challenge. These kinds of classroom environments could be a source of noise and disruptive behavior if teachers do not get learners engaged in the lesson. Additionally, trying to speak the language in a noisy classroom environment is not effective for achieving language goals. Learners need to be exposed to meaningful language and use the target language to explain content but modeling authentic language may not help a lot. Language classrooms sometimes become the only source of authentic language and failing to provide enough exposure to the FL may lead to the use of

inappropriate methods for teaching oral skills and in consequence result in inefficient speaking classes.

Certainly, many EFL environments lack dense exposure to the language. EFL instructors are the primary source of target language input, but some of them lack the qualifications necessary to teach speaking skills because they themselves struggle to speak the language fluently. Teachers with speaking limitations could provide learners with some exposure to the language by using online technologies such as audio recordings and videos in order to support their speaking lessons; however, instructors need to be careful in selecting appropriate material in accordance with the students' language proficiency level, so they can avoid learner frustration. Providing comprehensible input is fundamental to activating learners' capacity to interact in the foreign language. If students have clarity in pronunciation, grammatical structures and vocabulary they could certainly come up with some language production.

Language exposure could also be provided by increasing learners' opportunities to talk and planning interactive communicative teaching activities. A large-sized class environment may reduce learners' participation in oral activities. Thus, communicative activities could be developed in cooperative groups with minimal involvement of the teacher. Teachers could create the speaking tasks and assign roles based on students' abilities. The use of cooperative groups is a strategy for facing large classes difficulties, but teachers will need to organize the students by keeping the groups small and balanced. Additionally, pair work, group work, role plays, and interviews may support shy or weaker students with room to practice with confidence using the target language, and thus with this practice their communicative competence may improve.

Although the communicative activities formerly mentioned may promote more frequent use of and exposure to the foreign language, teachers still need to find strategies to address

learners' tendency to use L1 when working in small groups. One strategy that teachers could use is to encourage small groups to earn points and get rewards as they put more effort into participating in speaking activities and using the target language inside and outside of the classroom. However, the best way to face this difficulty is by providing the appropriate vocabulary and grammar so learners feel confident using the language.

Teaching with Limited Resources

The booklet opens room to the lack of resources for the English class. Limitations for teaching language classes seems to vary across public schools. Many language classrooms are equipped with minimal teaching materials and sometimes teachers are willing to invest their own resources to buy material to benefit their students. Some convenient options EF teachers could use if they do not have enough resources for developing speaking skills, provided by their school district, is to promote classroom projects in which learners provide their own materials in order to participate in the speaking activity. Thus, teachers may overcome the lack of posters and flashcards and over time with learners' cooperation, they could build a stock of suitable materials for their classes.

It has been mentioned that technological resources are effective at teaching large-sized classes. However, it seems that plenty of public schools also neglect to provide the basic technological resources teachers need to develop their classes. As a result, EF educators are unable to take advantage of new technologies and tools to benefit their teaching practice. A strategy that could help to overcome this lack could be working with offline activities. Teachers could have a storage device to save multimedia material they collect, such as videos and audio, and they could also export and print the visual material to use within a lesson. Public schools

may not provide teachers with enough resources to supporting language classes, but the few materials that are provided, such as tape recordings, televisions or some video beams could be used, along with some printed material, to overcome most of the deficiencies that those schools have.

EFL teachers could also use sticky notes, poster paper, construction paper, visual aids and others when planning communicative activities. Instructors should spend a significant amount of time creating useful material if they really want to achieve effective results and improve speaking skills in large groups.

Teaching with Time Limitation

Another limitation described in the booklet is related to time. This factor sometimes becomes a constraint when teaching speaking skills, especially in large-sized classes. Teachers lack time to develop materials for communicative classes and they also lack class time to develop more speaking activities and provide appropriate feedback to each learner. Sixty-six percent of the Colombian teachers considered time limitations to be the main challenge to teach communicative skills. Most teachers stated that they were teaching English two or three times per week, but class periods are usually less than an hour. Evidently, shifting teaching practices from a traditional method to a more communicative approach demands teachers to use class time effectively.

EFL class-time is insufficient and public schools are unlikely to add more time to English classes. Thus, teachers need to find effective ways to utilize the short periods of time to develop students' communicative skills. One possible strategy could be to strategically plan the lessons so that the language skills are integrated, but activities aiming to meet the communicative

standards are carried over the next class. Teachers could plan weekly lessons and establish one learning goal to be met over multiple days. A speaking activity could be planned to be completed in various steps during different class periods. With this strategy, learners may have more time to participate in communicative tasks. Teachers could also use a lot of grouping activities and also assign group work to be completed outside the classroom. Group work may promote collaborative work and limit the number of presentations during a class period, so that teachers have more opportunity to observe and give feedback to learners.

Another strategy to optimize class time involves revising the EFL curriculum. Curricula should be relevant to students' needs rather than responding to national goals. Even though schools must work to meet academic national standards, they also have certain autonomy to create their own teaching plans based on their own academic contexts. EFL teachers could revise the school curriculum and adjust it, considering students' needs, class time and the school context. Teaching a curriculum that just responds to the national goals may put at risk the main aim of teaching a language class.

Using Varied Classroom Activities

The last strategy is very useful. The booklet describes some classroom activities for promoting speaking skills in respond to the aims of the Communicative Approach. Evidently, CLT could be an effective approach to enhance learning English by using it. Teachers could identify some communicative activities that promote speaking skills and take them to their classes to overcome some common difficulties presented in their classroom, especially when working with large-sized classes. Those classroom activities should be different from the traditional ones which focus on repetition and memorization of sentences. Thus, the activities

below have been selected based on some recommendations and conclusions of multiple studies related to EFL teaching.

Individual speaking presentations.

These kinds of activities aim to encourage learners to use the target language with no interaction with each other. Keeping in mind large classes, teachers are highly recommended to promote the use of technologies for developing these kinds of presentations. Learners could make short videos of themselves by using their own devices or any application that helps to this aim. For instance, they could do a *Picture Presentation* by using a multimedia, a power point presentation or any other visual aid.

Group speaking and pair work.

Group speaking is the most common speaking activity to provide learners with some oral practice. The students could participate in group speaking by pairs or small groups:

- i. *Dialogs*: Teachers could outline conversations, so learners just follow some directions or a script to build their own interactions. Another option it could be learners creating their own conversations by using the vocabulary and grammatical structures that have been worked in class.
- ii. *Role Plays*: In this speaking activity, teachers require learners to act out by providing or explaining a scene, assigning roles or characters and making them practice useful expressions.
- iii. *Structured Interviews*: These are activities where the students question each other to exchange real information.

- iv. *Performance Activities*: During these activities, learners prepare and present something to the class.
- v. *Information-Gap Activities*: The aim of these activities is that students communicate to get the information they do not possess. They will need to use the language to exchange unknown information.

Communication games.

Throughout these activities, learners need to use the target language to get some information by taking walks around the class. For instance, *Find someone* is a communicative game that encourages learners to ask structured questions to most students in the class. There are other dynamic activities that teachers could develop to stimulate speaking skills and pronunciation. Those activities include tongue twisters, songs, poem recitation and language games.

Discussions and debates.

Despite these kinds of activities seem to be the most challenging one in a FL context, teachers could reserve and work them with more proficient language learners. EF instructors could also develop these oral activities by combining them with others so less proficient language learners can contribute in a different way to the discussion or debate.

Online resources.

Online technologies are a great resource to support speaking activities. Teachers could use learning platforms as well as some applications and tools such as language websites, chats,

blogs, and social networks to create speaking opportunities both, inside and outside the classroom. EF teachers should use educational and authentic videos in order to have more students engaged in their classes and motivate them to practice the language.

Final Words

The strategies and tools in the booklet suggest some ideas to EFL teachers on overcoming some classroom difficulties when developing communicative skills for large-sized classes in public schools. Many of them correspond to strategies implemented in the CLT approach. EF teachers with time limitations and lack of resources could implement those communicative approaches; however, they need to put much effort into motivating learners and adjusting their lesson to use the target language based on their own level of language proficiency.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

EFL teachers used to face multiple challenges when teaching English by implementing CLT approaches. Some difficulties that they usually face are demotivated students, time limitations, limited teaching resources, and lack of training. To be sure, large classes become a strong barrier in order to achieve the goal of teaching more communicative classes. Teachers as well as learners have encountered different difficulties in the process of teaching and learning the target language.

EFL teachers in multiple countries have reported similar difficulties that are impacting negatively the development of interactive activities. On one hand, learner-related difficulties and attitudes towards communicative activities are mainly related to psychological factors, such as anxiety and fear, because of students' low language proficiency level. On the other hand, teacher-centered methods seem to be a characteristic of EFL classes. In fact, EFL teachers face multiple difficulties. For instance, they struggle to leave non-traditional grammar translation methods, and their time limitation and lack of training and teaching do not contribute at all to developing speaking skills.

By working this project, I realized that large groups remain a big challenge for teachers implementing communicative activities. However, I found out some classroom strategies that help teachers to face some of those challenges. We as teachers need to encourage learners to learn the language by finding opportunities to engage them in the activities, so they feel involved and have a better attitude towards the FL. Teachers should carefully plan speaking activities by thinking about grouping students and carrying out varied activities. Some strategies that I found

out aim to make learners feel confident. Thus, small groups are a great strategy for learners to support each other by working collaboratively.

Teaching a foreign language in an environment where learners as well as students have few opportunities to listen and use the language holds numerous challenges. I created the booklet by thinking about my own experience as a FL teacher. It has always been my concern how to face demotivated students and work with a class with more than thirty students. Student population is not the only concern. There are also several EFL teacher-related difficulties that require attention. That is why I described the challenges in this specific teaching scenario. By writing this thesis, I realized that most challenges have been a topic of discussion in multiple EFL research studies worldwide. Getting to know the challenges of teaching EFL in a large class would allow instructors to make decisions about which techniques and tools to use in order to shift their classes from a teacher-centered instruction to a more student-centered approach.

The booklet that I created, not only suggests ten strategies for teachers trying to face some classroom difficulties when developing speaking skills, but also encourages teachers to participate in professional development, carefully plan and use technological tools to support their daily lessons and promote interactions inside the classroom. Teaching speaking skills in large-sized classes is an issue that requires teachers to pay too much attention. I hope some of those strategies help EFL teachers to overcome common challenges presented in large, multi-level language classes. They will identify some difficulties immersed in EFL classrooms and learn some activities that promote the CLT approach.

I am planning to print, present, and share this booklet with some teachers from my home city. I developed this project by thinking about my own teaching environment in my country. I designed a survey during the project just to see if some teachers in my home country were facing

the same difficulties that were described in multiple studies. Undoubtedly, EFL challenges are the same worldwide, which is why I think this product will be very useful for teachers to analyze their teaching practices and identify common difficulties in EFL contexts. It is evident that EFL instructors need to be trained in how to develop interactive activities and use technological resources because having linguistic competence in the target language is not enough of a condition for being able to use the language communicatively. There is an urgent need for teachers to learn communicative language teaching methods in order to adjust their classroom practices towards a more interactive environment.

Although some researchers have pointed out some useful reflections to develop active learning strategies, further work should be done to research the implementation of CLT in small groups with the same limitations that large-sized classes face. This could demonstrate whether only the number of students matters or if there are stronger factors impacting teaching in FL contexts.

Appendix

SPEAKING SKILLS IN LARGE-SIZED CLASSES

Challenges and some useful strategies



10 strategies to work with large classes in an FL environment

By María Cristina Fory

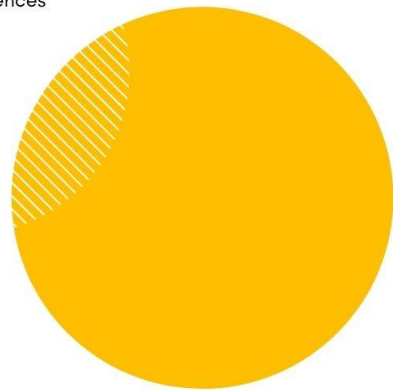
A Booklet for EFL Teachers

This is a project designed to apply for a Master of Arts in
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College, Greensboro, North Carolina, the USA
by María Cristina Fory Possú, April 2021.
Designed in Canva by Enid B. Carranza Cambroneró.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

04	Introduction	15	Promoting Communicative Language Teaching
05	Strategies	17	Promoting greater exposure to the target language
05	Motivating learners	19	Teaching with limited resources
07	Using innovative strategies	20	Teaching with time limitation
09	Participating in teachers' outgoing training	21	Using varied classroom activities
11	Teaching with effective materials	26	Final words
12	Implementing appropriate ICTs	27	References



INTRODUCTION

Some strategies for teachers working in an FL environment.

Large-sized classes seem to be a common feature presented in public schools when teaching English as a foreign language. Developing speaking skills when teaching EFL in large classes has been an issue. Teachers struggle to make students talk and interact in those specific contexts due to the multiple circumstances related to demotivation, anxiety, lack of resources, as well as others. The concern is if teaching large classes is the main reason for instructors failing to develop speaking skills. The question is if teaching a small-

sized class may be the most convenient environment for effective teaching and achievement of the target goals.

The number of students in a classroom is not a sufficient condition for achieving the communicative goals. Developing speaking skills in EFL contexts requires a conjunction of factors such as psychological-affective conditions, class materials, teaching training, and others that, together, may help teachers and learners to move smoothly in the teaching-learning process.



According to Sharndama (2013), a large class means having more students than the recommended class size or than the learning materials and physical structures can withstand.

STRATEGIES

1. MOTIVATING STUDENTS

Encouraging learners to learn the language should be the first element to be present in EFL classes. Students' lack of motivation could respond to their poor preparation for speaking the language. In consequence, they fear being laughed at or criticized by their classmates if they make a mistake when answering a question or participating during the class activities. Learners' negative attitude towards the English language is a strong barrier.

Facing the problem

- Plan activities that help to identify learners' needs, interests, preferences, and expectations. By knowing the learners, teachers could identify the topics and activities that may engage them in the lessons.
- Prevent some unacceptable misbehavior by setting classroom rules and teaching students to show respect for others.
- Vary the material and differentiate the activities. Students' motivation sometimes is related to the kind of activities that teachers take to their classes.
- Plan your lessons using variables such as the language proficiency levels, the age, and needs of students.

Identify learners'
needs, interests,
preferences, and
expectations.



Facing the problem (Cont.)

Develop some
success-orientated
activities for weaker
learners so they do
not feel frustrated in
completing speaking
tasks



- Have challenging activities for Advanced students, so they do not get bored and provide weaker learners with activities that make sense for them, so they do not become a disruption during the class. Multi-level classes are sometimes the main reason for learners' demotivation.
- Use higher-level students as assistants or monitors to show their skills and help others during group work.
- Develop some success-orientated activities for weaker learners, so they do not feel frustrated in completing speaking tasks.
- Build confidence and reduce students' anxiety and stress.
- Include useful, enjoyable, and full of real-life situations that engage learners to take the risk to participate.
- Explain the class goals.

2. USING INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES

Having learners motivated is not enough guarantee of an effective learning process. Teaching speaking in large classes requires special strategies and tools, so learners remain motivated to participate. Innovation is not only related to technology but to something different from daily practice. Language teachers need to use more than technological resources to make their classes look attractive.

1

Have learners like the center of the instruction and provide them with plenty of oral tasks to use the language.

2

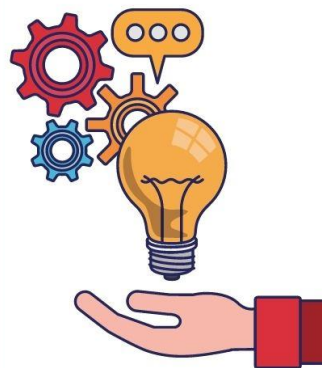
Avoid using traditional teaching approaches such as grammar translation methods.

3

Create scenarios to help learners to learn how to use the target language in social situations. Integrate the four skills. Working reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in isolation is not recommendable.

4

Adopt interactive communicative teaching activities.



*Innovation
is not only
about
technology!*

5

Pre-teach vocabulary as well as any grammar or functional language in order to facilitate teaching future speaking lessons.

6

Group learners in pairs or small groups to give learners opportunities to practice the language.

7

Enhance participation throughout Semi-structured Interviews or Conversations, Questionnaires such as find someone.

8

Promote whole group participation by doing Linked Story Telling initiated by the instructor by narrating anything in which learners could use learned vocabulary and grammar structures

9

Stimulate students' interests with songs, poems, rhythms, and tongue twisters: these activities are useful to teach vocabulary and drill pronunciation.

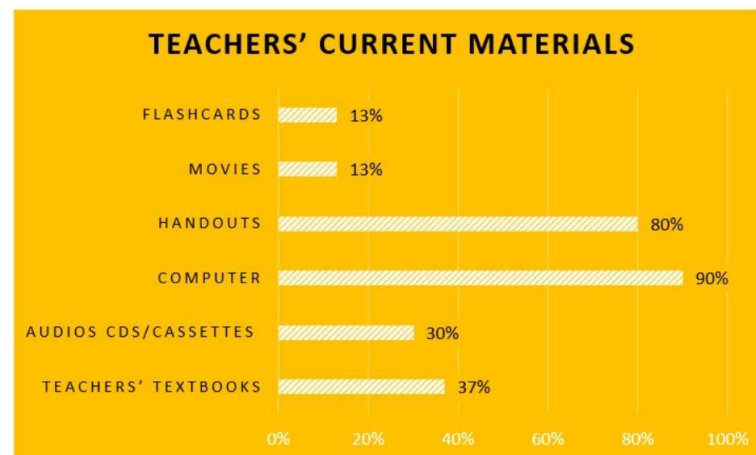
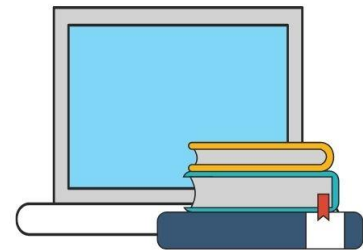


3. PARTICIPATING IN TEACHERS OUTGOING TRAINING

We need to make adjustments in our social media campaign to make it more successful.

Speaking is the primary productive skill, and getting some mastery on how to develop it requires devoting time to training. Teachers should incorporate more time for learners to interact with each other. The teacher must develop group discussions, role-plays, language games, presentations, and others in the classroom; however, getting to carry out these activities may be easier if teachers are familiar with the appropriate strategies.

Teacher's training should be linked to the use of appropriate teaching material. A survey I conducted myself with 29 EFL teachers from different public schools in Colombia, South America showed the computer and handbooks are the main resources teachers use in the classroom. See table below.



New technologies have highly benefited the access to plenty of online resources and information by just using any device. Teachers could participate in the professional training world widely and join academic groups to interact professionally and have access to free helpful resources.

Working Strategies

- Providing English teachers with seminars, workshops, and other training courses for helping them learn methods of teaching.
- Working collaboratively throughout Teachers Networks. Sometimes, the limitations are not the lack of material but how to use them, especially when the school does not count on enough technological resources that benefit language learners.
- Sharing experiences on some effective strategies to work with large-sized classes.



"Teacher training should be given high importance because it plays a fundamental role in enhancing the quality of the teachers' performance in the classroom which consequently improves the students' level of English"
(Al-Sobhi et al., 2018p. 9).

Teachers' networks support classroom practice.

4. TEACHING WITH EFFECTIVE MATERIALS

Teaching resources for developing speaking skills in large classes should be a topic of concern. Developing communicative skills demands identifying what type of educational material better enhances this aim. Useful resources for promoting speaking activities include printed material.



POSTERS



FLASHCARDS

Teachers who are not well equipped with classroom materials are encouraged to make their own teaching material and save and reuse it later. Flashcards, as well as posters, could be created by assigning students classroom projects. Teachers will engage learners in making their own material individually or in group activities. These visuals are useful to support their oral presentations. There are plenty of printable online resources which teachers could also laminate and reuse in different lessons.

Public schools count on teachers' and students' textbooks. Still, this educational material is not effective enough for teaching neither speaking nor listening skills because sometimes textbooks come with no audio CDs or because most activities have been designed to carry out only reading and writing tasks.



TEXTBOOKS



AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

5. IMPLEMENTING APPROPRIATELY ICTS



Undoubtedly, ICTs have facilitated communication worldwide. ICTs may be a useful tool when teaching a large class. Teachers could use technological resources to facilitate the teaching and learning of the language. ICTs should be a good option in large-sized classes.



**Interactive activities
(peer work,
discussions,
interviews, others)**

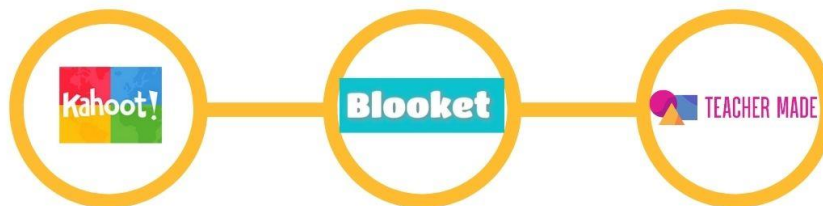
CREATING ATTRACTIVE LESSONS

ICTs allow the combination of pictures, sounds, and texts to have students engaged:

- *Combine pictures, sounds, texts.*
- *Take to your classes real videos of native speakers.*
- *Use multimedia resources such as movies, infomercials.*
- *Support your instruction with PowerPoint slides to display information to many students and present vocabulary and grammar content.*

Learning and practicing English throughout websites have currently become a way to support most classes. ICTs may engage students in learning with autonomy and enthusiasm. Teachers could select a lesson material based on learners' level of language of proficiency and needs. There are multiple websites and applications and a huge number of printable materials to support speaking ideas in a large class.

SOME USEFUL WEBSITES



<https://learnhip.com/conversation/>
<https://nearpod.com/>
<https://www.blooket.com/dashboard>
<https://www.funbrain.com/>
<https://www.liveworksheets.com/worksheets/en>

<https://kahoot.com/schools-u/>
<https://nearpod.com/>
<https://www.learnamericanenglishonline.com/>
<https://listenaminute.com/>
<https://canva.com>

Multimedia material allows teachers to differentiate the instruction by assigning each learner activities based on their needs. Students with limited speaking skills could use some applications to record their voices or make videos if they do not feel comfortable speaking in front of others. Multiple websites also provide opportunities to improve pronunciation and listening skills by exploring the activities based on students' language proficiency levels.



*ICTs themselves do not transform
the learning and teaching of the
target language
(Sharndam 2013)*

Vs

Teacher training changes teachers' methods and strategies. Using ICTs is a great strategy to change classes from teacher-centered instruction to a student student-centered learning environment.



6. PROMOTING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Communicative Language Teaching should be the primary approach for teaching speaking skills. This communicative approach promotes learner-centered activities and gives them more opportunities to practice oral skills.

Adopting CLT in the foreign language classroom makes the students attentive and participative in the classroom. All activities aim to motivate students to communicate and have a positive attitude towards learning. Using the target language as a means rather than as an objective, learners may be able to use the language while developing their skills.

CLT requires taking to the class activities that integrate the four language skills. Teachers should not teach individual communication skills in isolation. Combining the four skills allows fostering communication. Learners may be more engaged in tasks in which they see, listening, analyze and express ideas based on different contexts.



- ✓ Learners participate in dialogues, discussions, or debates adapted to their language proficiency level.
- ✓ Advanced learners contribute with longer and natural outcomes
- ✓ Weaker learners participate with shorter statements after activation.



Conversations taking place at different scenarios.

Interviews to peers.

These pedagogical tasks respond to the need of using engaging activities to solve difficulties related to the lack of speaking practice in large-sized groups.

Some recommended CLT activities

Discussions adjusted to different levels and developed in steps:

- Searching information
- Brainstorming vocabulary and useful expressions.
- Grouping students in small groups and assigning roles to each integrant.

These steps help students to be prepared and give them a sense of contribution to the discussion.



Role plays to speak and act in situations that resemble to the outside of the classroom contexts.

Classroom discussions encouraging learners to share their ideas about a topic.

7 PROVIDING GREATER EXPOSURE TO THE TARGET LANGUAGE

In the language teaching and learning process, it is common to hear that teachers and learners should create opportunities to practice their skills inside and outside the classrooms. Unlike this claim, it is usually found that EF teachers and learners fail to use spoken English very often.

For instance, 63% of the Colombian FL teachers participating in the survey referred before replied that they usually use the foreign language during their classes, and only 16% of them reported they always do.



There is a strong tendency to use L1 during the foreign language class as a practice presented in teachers who still privilege traditional teaching and learning methods.



Teaching speaking skills in a large-sized class is a challenge. These classroom environments could be a source of noise and disruptive behavior if teachers do not get to have learners engaged in the lesson. Trying to speak the language in a noisy classroom environment is not effective enough for achieving the language goals.



Teachers are the first source of target language input. Failing to provide an exemplary exposure may take inappropriate teaching methods for teaching oral skills and, consequently, inefficient speaking classes.



Some instructors lack the qualifications to teach speaking skills because they struggle to speak the language. Some strategies to this limitation could be using online technologies such as audio recording and videos, carefully selected by the students' language proficiency level.

Exposing learners to the foreign language



Teacher's role

Comprehensible input

Student's Exposure

Find meaningful language.

Pronunciation

Opportunities to talk

Model authentic language

Grammar structures

Interactive communicative activities (pair work, role plays, interviews)

Find strategies to address learners' tendency to use L1 when working in small groups

Vocabulary

Cooperative groups

Complementary strategies could be games and competitions, so learners get engaged to participate by using the language simultaneously to be rewarded. However, the best way to face this difficulty is by providing the appropriate vocabulary and grammar, so learners feel confident to use the language.

8 TEACHING WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

Limitations for teaching language classes seem to be a variable in many public schools. Languages classrooms are equipped with minimal teaching materials, and sometimes teachers are willing to invest their own resources for buying material for the benefit of their students.

Some strategies:

- Promoting classroom projects developed by the learners: Teachers may overcome the lack of posters and flashcards with learners' cooperation. They could build a stock of suitable materials for their classes.
- Using technology, but throughout offline activities: Working offline activities in response to the poor material that many public schools have.
- Using stored material such as videos and audios.
- Printing visual material to be used in multiple lessons and with diverse groups.
- Planning communicative activities using sticking notes, poster paper, construction paper, visuals, and others.
- Creating useful materials, they could build a stock of durable materials.

Public schools may not provide teachers with enough resources to supporting language classes, but the few materials that are provided, such as tape recordings, televisions or some video beams could be used, along with some printed material, to overcome most of the deficiencies that those schools have.



9 TEACHING WITH TIME LIMITATION

Time sometimes becomes a constraint when teaching speaking skills, especially in large-sized classes. Teachers lack time for developing materials for communicative classes, and they also lack class time for developing more speaking activities and providing appropriate feedback to each learner.

Sixty-six percent of the Colombian teachers considered time limitations the main challenge to teach communicative skills. Most of them declared to teach English twice or three times per week, but the class period usually takes less than an hour. Evidently, shifting teaching practices from a traditional method to a more communicative approach demands teachers' effective class time.

- Plan strategically: language skills are worked in integration, but activities aiming to meet the communicative standards are spread in multiple classes.
- Plan weekly lessons and establish one learning goal to be met in multiple days.
- Develop speaking activities to be completed in various steps at different class periods.
- Group students to have fewer presentations during your classes.
- Observe to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses and then plan based on their needs.
- Revise the EFL curriculum and establish relevant topics to respond to students' needs rather than national goals.
- Create your own teaching plan based on the current academic context.
- Adjust the EFL curriculum considering students' needs, class time, and the school context.

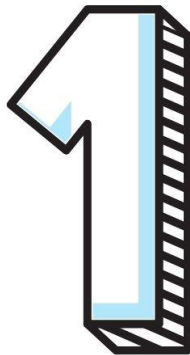




10 USING VARIED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Classroom activities for promoting speaking skills should respond to the aims of communicative approaches. Teachers could identify some communicative activities that may promote speaking skills and take them to their classes to overcome some common difficulties in their classroom, especially if they work with large-sized classrooms.

Classroom activities should be different from the traditional tasks, which focus on repetition and memorization of sentences. Multiple studies related to EFL teaching have recommended some useful communicative activities enhancing interaction between learners.



Individual speaking presentations

These activities aim to encourage learners to use the target language to do solo presentations using technological resources. For instance, learners could make short videos of themselves by using their own devices or any application that helps to this aim. They could do a Picture Presentation using multimedia, a PowerPoint presentation, or any other visual aid.



Group Speaking and Pair Work

2

Group speaking is the most common speaking activity to provide learners with some oral practice. The students could participate in group speaking by pairs or small groups:

- i. Dialogs: Learners follow an outline or a script to build their interactions. They can also create their own conversations by using the vocabulary, and grammatical structures worked in class.
- ii. Role Plays: Teachers provide or explain a scene, assign roles or characters and useful expressions so learners can act out.
- iii. Structured Interviews: Students question each other to exchange real information.
- iv. Performance Activities: Learners prepare and present something to the class.
- v. Information-Gap Activities: Students communicate to get the information they do not possess. They will need to use the language to exchange unknown information.



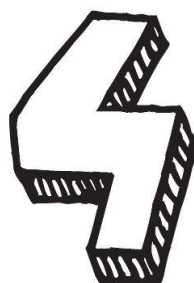
Communication Games

3

Learners need to use the target language to get some information by taking walks around the class. The most common communication game includes *Find someone*, which encourages learners to ask structured questions to most students in the class.

There are other dynamic activities that teachers could develop to stimulate speaking skills and pronunciation. Those activities include tongue twisters, songs, poem recitation, and language games.





Discussions and Debates

These activities seem to be challenging, but EF instructors could develop these oral activities by combining them with others, so less proficient language learners can contribute in a different way to the discussion or debate.

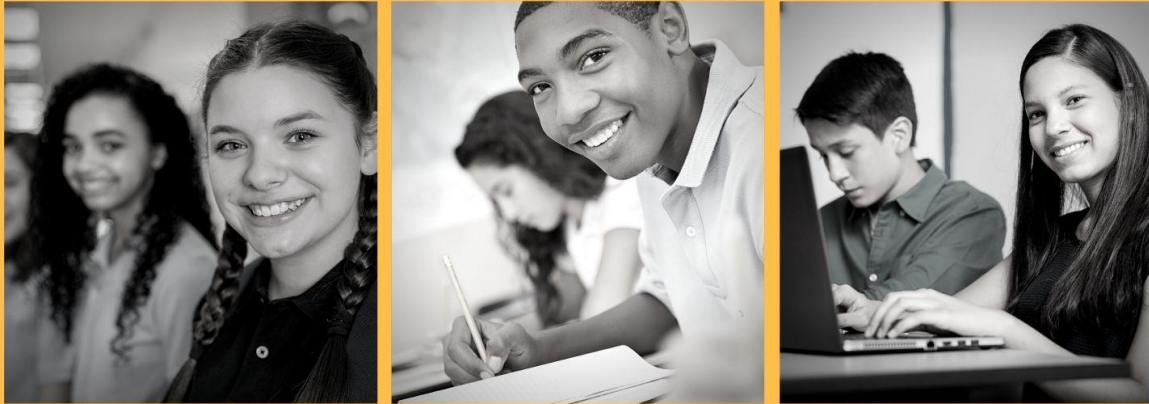
5

Online Resources

Online technologies are a great resource to support speaking activities. Teachers could use learning platforms as well as some applications and tools such as language websites, chats, blogs, and social networks to create speaking opportunities both, inside and outside the classroom. EF teachers could use educational and authentic videos in order to have more students engaged in their classes and motivate them to practice the language.



FINAL WORDS



The strategies and tools in this booklet suggest some ideas to EFL teachers on overcoming some classroom difficulties when developing communicative skills for large-sized classes in public schools. Many of them correspond to strategies implemented in the CLT approach. EF teachers with time limitations and lack of resources could implement those communicative approaches; however, they need to put much effort into motivating learners and adjusting their lesson to use the target language based on their own level of language proficiency.

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